

# RUTH AND ESTHER

A 12-WEEK STUDY



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 **CROSSWAY**  
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*Knowing the Bible: Ruth and Esther, A 12-Week Study*

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## S E R I E S P R E F A C E

**KNOWING THE BIBLE**, as the series title indicates, was created to help readers know and understand the meaning, the message, and the God of the Bible. Each volume in the series consists of 12 units that progressively take the reader through a clear, concise study of that book of the Bible. In this way, any given volume can fruitfully be used in a 12-week format either in group study, such as in a church-based context, or in individual study. Of course, these 12 studies could be completed in fewer or more than 12 weeks, as convenient, depending on the context in which they are used.

Each study unit gives an overview of the text at hand before digging into it with a series of questions for reflection or discussion. The unit then concludes by highlighting the gospel of grace in each passage (“Gospel Glimpses”), identifying whole-Bible themes that occur in the passage (“Whole-Bible Connections”), and pinpointing Christian doctrines that are affirmed in the passage (“Theological Soundings”).

The final component to each unit is a section for reflecting on personal and practical implications from the passage at hand. The layout provides space for recording responses to the questions proposed, and we think readers need to do this to get the full benefit of the exercise. The series also includes definitions of key words. These definitions are indicated by a note number in the text and are found at the end of each chapter.

Lastly, to help understand the Bible in this deeper way, we urge readers to use the ESV Bible and the *ESV Study Bible*, which are available in various print and digital formats, including online editions at [www.esvbible.org](http://www.esvbible.org). The *Knowing the Bible* series is also available online. Additional 12-week studies covering each book of the Bible will be added as they become available.

May the Lord greatly bless your study as you seek to know him through knowing his Word.

J. I. Packer  
Lane T. Dennis

# WEEK 1: OVERVIEW OF RUTH



## Getting Acquainted

Two books in the Bible are named after women: Ruth and Esther. These women lived approximately five centuries apart, one in the period leading up to the kingdom of Israel,<sup>1</sup> and the other following the kingdom's decline and fall. One was a foreigner who came to the land of Judah; the other was a Jew who lived in a foreign land. God has always been at work in the whole world he made and over which he rules. Both women played crucial roles in the big story of God's redeeming<sup>2</sup> a people for himself from all the nations through his Son.

We begin with Ruth, a foreigner who found a home in Bethlehem. She lived during the period of the judges, when there was yet no king in Israel and "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judg. 21:25). This masterful narrative is about Ruth, but it is even more about God's covenant<sup>3</sup> kindness to his people—even in the midst of their repeated rebellion against him. Ruth's mother-in-law, Naomi, doubts but then learns this kindness, as Ruth and Boaz live it out before her eyes. In four artfully shaped scenes, these three characters live *the story of a God who provides for his people according to his promises*.

The narrative draws us into the experience of these widowed women who move from empty desolation in Moab to full provision back in Bethlehem. But

## WEEK 1: OVERVIEW OF RUTH

the story keeps lifting our eyes in the process, letting us glimpse the God in charge of famine and harvest and barrenness and birth and death and indeed every scene of human history. Reading the book of Ruth, we marvel at Ruth's story and we see more clearly the God who so kindly directs it. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 475–477, or visit [www.esvbible.org](http://www.esvbible.org).)

### Placing It in the Larger Story

God's covenant promises to Abraham (Gen. 12:1–7) are beautifully displayed in Ruth. Although the period in which she lived was one of disobedience and disarray, God had indeed made Abraham's seed into a great people and settled them in the Land of Promise. In Ruth's life, the blessing<sup>4</sup> promised to those who bless God's people proves true. As she, the foreigner, is enfolded among them, we catch a glimpse of all the families of the earth being blessed by Abraham's seed.

The crowning evidence of God's covenant faithfulness emerges at the book's end, with the repeated mention of Ruth's descendant David (Ruth 4:17–22), the great king to whom God promised an eternal throne (2 Sam. 7:12–17). But this blessing peeks through from the moment we open Ruth and begin to read about Bethlehem in Judah—Judah being the land named after the tribe from which David came. The Scriptures ultimately show the fulfillment of all God's promises in the coming of Jesus Christ, the heavenly king born in Bethlehem, in the line of David. Matthew 1:1–6 gives us the genealogy that Ruth helps unfold in living color.

The book of Ruth is one episode in the story of Jesus. It's an episode that shows the utterly magnificent and intensely personal kindness of this God who is redeeming a people for himself from all the families of the earth. As God fulfills all Ruth's and Naomi's needs for food, home, and family, through their redeemer Boaz, we glimpse the heavenly Redeemer in whom all these needs are finally and fully met.

### Key Verse

“Then the women said to Naomi, ‘Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel!’” (Ruth 4:14).

### Date and Historical Background

Ruth's story takes place “in the days when the judges ruled” (Ruth 1:1). The book of Judges describes this period (c. 13th–11th centuries BC) as a downward-spiraling cycle of sinful<sup>5</sup> rebellion by God's people, followed by

cries for help to God who sends a deliverer/judge, followed again by sinful rebellion. Such a background for Ruth's story highlights both the need for and the wonder of God's merciful<sup>6</sup> faithfulness to his people.

The book's concluding genealogy, with its mention of David, implies that it was composed later, after David's taking the throne in c. 1010 BC.

## Outline

- I. Introduction: Naomi Bereft of Family (1:1–5)
- II. Scene 1: Naomi Returns to Bethlehem with Ruth (1:6–22)
- III. Scene 2: Ruth Gleans in Boaz's Field (2:1–23)
- IV. Scene 3: Ruth, at the Threshing Floor, Asks Boaz to Marry Her (3:1–18)
- V. Scene 4: Boaz Arranges Redemption at the Gate (4:1–12)
- VI. Conclusion: Naomi Blessed with a New Family (4:13–17)
- VII. Genealogy: Extended Blessing (4:18–22)

## As You Get Started . . .

Do a quick read-through of Ruth, as if you were reading a short story. What aspects of the book stand out after such a reading? Jot down some of your initial observations.

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This book called "Ruth" doesn't start and end with Ruth! Look at the prominent role of Naomi in the beginning (ch. 1) and the end (4:13–17). What do you notice? What are your thoughts at this point on why Naomi provides the "bookends" to this story?

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## WEEK 1: OVERVIEW OF RUTH

On first reading, what specific words (perhaps repeated ones) or phrases stand out to you? Write them down. How might those words help clarify the big picture of what this book is about?

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### As You Finish This Unit . . .

Take a moment now to ask God to bless you with increased understanding and a transformed heart and life as you study the book of Ruth. Look back through this introductory chapter and underline words or thoughts you would like to pray about or consider further. May the Spirit who inspired Scripture's living and active words use them to challenge and encourage our hearts.

### Definitions

- <sup>1</sup> **Israel** – Originally, another name given to Jacob (Gen. 32:28). Later applied to the nation formed by his descendants, then to the 10 northern tribes of that nation, who rejected the anointed king and formed their own nation. In the NT, the name is applied to the church as the spiritual descendants of Abraham (Gal. 6:16).
- <sup>2</sup> **Redemption** – In the context of the Bible, the act of buying back someone who had become enslaved or something that had been lost to someone else. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus purchased redemption for all believers (Col. 1:13–14).
- <sup>3</sup> **Covenant** – A binding agreement between two parties, typically involving a formal statement of their relationship, a list of stipulations and obligations for both parties, a list of witnesses to the agreement, and a list of curses for unfaithfulness and blessings for faithfulness to the agreement. God throughout Old Testament times established covenants with his people, all of which he faithfully keeps, and all of whose benefits come to God's people finally through Christ, who inaugurated the new covenant (1 Cor. 11:25).
- <sup>4</sup> **Bless** – To worship or praise another, especially God; to bestow goodness on another.
- <sup>5</sup> **Sin** – Any violation of or failure to adhere to the commands of God.
- <sup>6</sup> **Mercy** – Compassion and kindness toward someone experiencing hardship, sometimes even when such suffering results from the person's own sin or foolishness. God displays mercy toward his people and they, in turn, are called to display mercy toward others (Luke 6:36).

# WEEK 2: RETURNING TO BETHLEHEM

Ruth 1



## The Place of the Passage

Ruth begins with a brief introduction and a dramatic first scene that set the stage for the whole narrative. In the midst of a desolate context both historically and personally, Naomi decides to return from Moab to Bethlehem. That return precipitates the action of the rest of the story, beginning immediately with Ruth's response. This chapter shows Naomi's emptiness in Moab which, by book's end, will turn into the fullness of God's provision in Bethlehem.

## The Big Picture

Ruth 1 shows the context of Naomi's desolation (the time of the judges, famine, alienation from home, death, bitterness) and yet the seeds of hope in a return to a food-filled Bethlehem along with a faith-filled<sup>1</sup> daughter-in-law, Ruth.

**Reflection and Discussion**

Read Ruth 1 slowly and carefully. Then consider and write your reflections on the following questions, which move through the chapter section by section. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 478–479, or visit [www.esvbible.org](http://www.esvbible.org).)

**1. Introduction: The Desolate Context (1:1–5)**

For a glimpse into the period of the judges (1:1), read Judges 2:6–23 and 21:25. Why might this background be important for understanding the book of Ruth?

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Elimelech evidently didn't intend to leave permanently the Land of Promise or his own particular clan, city, and tribe within it (1:2). He meant only to "sojourn" (1:1), or to *stay a while* in Moab, to escape the famine in Israel. Look on a map to find the land of Moab across the Dead Sea from Bethlehem. Moab's inhabitants were the descendants of an incestuous union between Lot and one of his daughters (Gen. 19:30–38). The Moabites worshiped other gods and were not friends of God's people (see Numbers 22–25). The story does not directly judge Elimelech, but in what ways might we see his move to Moab as problematic?

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**2. Naomi's Plan and Ruth's Determination (1:6–18)**

The book's introduction leaves Naomi in crisis, with sons and husband dead (1:5). In that place and time, a woman without a man was without means of support, helpless and vulnerable. And a wife without children to continue the

family line was regarded as a failure. Jewish law provided for “levirate marriage” (after the Latin *levir*, meaning “brother-in-law”), in which a brother was obliged to marry a childless widow of his deceased brother and to raise children in the brother’s name (see Deut. 25:5–10). Naomi refers to this law as she addresses her two daughters-in-law. Observe and listen carefully to Naomi in Ruth 1:6–15, and make a list of everything you can discern about her.

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Orpah took the sensible route and went home, but Ruth “clung” to her mother-in-law (v. 14). The same Hebrew word *dabaq* in Genesis 2:24 describes a man leaving his father and mother and “holding fast” to his wife. It’s a strong word. Ruth’s own words are strong and beautiful, full of poetic parallelism.<sup>2</sup> Make an outline of her statements (vv. 16–17). How do these statements grow, reaching a climax at the end? What do we learn here about Ruth?

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### 3. The Return (1:19–22)

“Naomi” means “pleasant,” but “Mara” means “bitter”—a name with which Naomi identifies at this point. In what ways does Naomi specifically attribute her bitterness to God in Ruth 1:13, 19–22? How might you evaluate her theology at this point?

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WEEK 2: RETURNING TO BETHLEHEM

What elements of hope does bitter Naomi seem to be ignoring throughout chapter 1?

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Dialogue is the main “meat” of each scene in this narrative. Ruth has the most powerful lines in chapter 1, but Naomi has the most! Imagine, though, what other possible words might have come from Naomi’s mouth at various points in the chapter, had she been more alert to God’s gracious hand at work.

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Note the “return from the country of Moab” in both verse 6 and verse 22—providing bookends for this dramatic scene. The final verse repeatedly emphasizes *return*, for both Naomi and “Ruth the Moabite.” This clearly represents a turning point in the story and in the experience of these women. Why is this return so important? How would you express what it is Naomi and Ruth are returning to? (For further context, read Josh. 1:1–6.)

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We have described this book as *the story of a God who provides for his people according to his promises*. In what ways does chapter 1 lead us to begin considering the various parts of this description?

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Read through the following three sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to consider the *Personal Implications* these sections may have for you.

### Gospel Glimpses

**A HEART CHANGED BY GRACE.**<sup>3</sup> We meet Ruth in this opening chapter only through words and actions, not through any narrative interpretation. But what we see strongly suggests a regenerative<sup>4</sup> work of God in Ruth, so that she gives her heart and her life not only to her mother-in-law but also to her mother-in-law's God. She has been drawn into a family that is part of God's people, where she clearly has heard enough about God to call him "LORD" (see "Whole-Bible Connections" below) and to begin to grasp the connection between God and his called-out people. Her words might even echo God's covenantal language to Abraham and his descendants, promising that he will be their God and they will be his people (see, for example, Gen. 17:7–8; Ex. 6:7). Such a story, like Rahab's before her (Joshua 2), makes us ask how and why God plucked this one person out of an ungodly nation. Why not Orpah? The text does not answer those questions but leaves us increasingly in awe of God's inexplicable grace that calls out sinners from every nation.

**A RETURN.** This chapter keeps reminding us that we are reading about a *return*. The gospel is all about God's providing a way for lost people to return to God—ever since Adam and Eve were separated from God by their sin but received his promise to provide a way for that sin to be defeated, through the seed (or "offspring") of the woman (Gen. 3:15). The shape of a *return story* resonates with the shape of redemption. The prophets called out again and again, "Return!" (see, for example, Hos. 14:1; Mal. 3:7). But they didn't simply call for a return. They pointed ahead to the means for that return: the promised Seed, the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ—the one born in Bethlehem, the very city to which Naomi is returning, in the land of God's promise. Scripture resounds with the call to return, ultimately to God himself. Both Naomi and Ruth follow this call and duly find the provision of God's grace.

### Whole-Bible Connections

**A COVENANT PEOPLE.** God's promises to Abraham (Gen. 12:1–7) stand out as context for this story. The details of Elimelech's background (Ruth 1:2) establish that we're dealing with the sons of Jacob descended from Abraham who were divided into tribes—now numerous, as God promised, and settled in the

land God promised. Accordingly, we feel the jarring of one of these descendants leaving the land; this jarring adds to the import of the *return*. We also feel the huge significance of a foreigner like Ruth so boldly purposing to become part of the people God has covenanted to bless. Only as the story develops do we with fuller understanding celebrate the way Ruth's enfolding into Israel is actually a beautiful part of the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham that, in him, "all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 12:3).

**HESED.** Ruth 1:8 brings the first of several appearances in this book of a profoundly beautiful Old Testament Hebrew word, *hesed*, often translated "steadfast love," "loving kindness," or simply "kindness." *Hesed* can refer both to human kindness and, in many instances, to the loving kindness of God toward his people. When God in his glory passes by Moses hidden in the cleft of the rock, there in Exodus 34:6 shines God's "steadfast love," surrounded by his mercy and faithfulness, and poured out on generations of his people. The Psalms repeatedly celebrate God's *hesed* (see, for example, Ps. 103:4; 106:7; Psalm 136). When we come upon it in Ruth 1:8, this word shines out, especially as it connects with the Lord's own kindness—offered in blessing by one of Abraham's descendants (Naomi) but referring to kindness passed on by those not in Abraham's line (Naomi's daughters-in-law). We shall see this word again in Ruth.

**YAHWEH.** When commissioned by God to lead his people out of Egypt, Moses asked God how to answer concerning the name of the one who had sent him. "God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.' And he said, 'Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you''" (Ex. 3:14). God here reveals his name "Yahweh" (corresponding to the four Hebrew consonants YHWH), which expresses both God's eternal being and his unfailing love for his people to whom he reveals himself. It is not surprising that Naomi, an Israelite, repeatedly uses this name, indicated in the English text by "LORD." However, Ruth's use of this name stands out. In her speech, Ruth first refers to Naomi's "God," with the more universally understood name (1:16). But in her climactic statement she implies a relationship between this God and herself, referring to him as "LORD," or "Yahweh" (v. 17). This seems a large hint that God has shown Ruth his *hesed*, as she has learned of him, taken this *hesed* to heart, and let it flow through her to those around.

### Theological Soundings

**PROVIDENCE.**<sup>5</sup> God's providence hovers over this chapter. The initial mention of famine brings to mind God's control over nature and use of it for his purposes (see, for example, Gen. 42:5 and Deut. 11:13–14). Naomi does not hear just that the famine is over in Israel but also that "the LORD had visited

his people and given them food” (1:6). “Food” here means literally “bread”—as in “Bethlehem,” which means literally “house of bread.” God is clearly at work, providing, *visiting* his people in substantial ways. We recall Joseph, who in God’s providence provided grain for his family and for all of famine-struck Egypt (Gen. 45:4–11), and who as he was dying prophesied God’s visitation to his people that would come in the exodus (50:24–25). One might think of Zechariah’s prophecy concerning the baby to be born in Bethlehem: “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people” (Luke 1:68). When Ruth 1 ends with the mention of barley harvest in Bethlehem, we sense God’s providential hand at work and look forward to seeing his provision on many levels.

**SOVEREIGNTY.**<sup>6</sup> God is in charge of this history, and Naomi knows it. She does not envision herself at the mercy of a random or chaotic universe. Even though she misunderstands God’s kind purposes, she does understand that a sovereign “Almighty” has brought about everything that has happened to her (1:20, 21). Naomi knows the Lord God Almighty rules, and she will learn to acknowledge his kindness even along the painful path on which he leads her.

### Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of Ruth 1 for your own life today. Make notes below on the personal implications for your walk with the Lord that you find in the (1) *Gospel Glimpses*, (2) *Whole-Bible Connections*, (3) *Theological Soundings*, and (4) this passage as a whole.

#### 1. Gospel Glimpses

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#### 2. Whole-Bible Connections

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### 3. Theological Soundings

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### 4. Ruth 1

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### As You Finish This Unit . . .

Take a moment now to ask for the Lord's blessing and help as you continue in this study of Ruth. Take a moment also to look back through this unit of study, to reflect on a few key things that the Lord may be teaching you—and perhaps to highlight and underline these things to review again in the future.

#### Definitions

- <sup>1</sup> **Faith** – Trust in or reliance upon something or someone despite a lack of concrete proof. Here the “someone” is God. Salvation, which is purely a work of God's grace, can be received only through faith (Rom. 5:2; Eph. 2:8–9). The writer of Hebrews calls on believers to emulate those who lived godly lives by faith (Hebrews 11).
- <sup>2</sup> **Parallelism** – A poetic device, employed in virtually all Hebrew poetry, that places together two or three concepts that are matching, opposing, or progressive in meaning. Essentially it is a “rhyming” of concepts rather than of sounds.
- <sup>3</sup> **Grace** – Unmerited favor, especially the free gift of salvation that God gives to believers through faith in Jesus Christ.
- <sup>4</sup> **Regeneration** – The Holy Spirit's work of bringing spiritual life to a person, thus enabling him or her to love and follow God. Essentially equivalent to what is often referred to as being “born again” or “saved.”
- <sup>5</sup> **Providence** – God's good, wise, and sovereign guidance and control of all things, by which he supplies all our needs and accomplishes his holy will.
- <sup>6</sup> **Sovereignty** – Supreme and independent power and authority. Sovereignty over all things is a distinctive attribute of God (1 Tim. 6:15–16). He directs all things to carry out his purposes (Rom. 8:28–29).

# WEEK 3: A MEETING IN THE BARLEY FIELD

Ruth 2



## The Place of the Passage

After Naomi's "empty" return to Bethlehem along with Ruth, we are ready to see how God will fill her. Scene two begins to unfold God's full provision for these women, as Ruth goes out to glean and encounters Boaz. The scene overflows with God's kind, abundant provision through Boaz, and it sets up the expectation of seeing how this encounter of Ruth and Boaz might develop.

## The Big Picture

God's kindness is demonstrated and recognized as Ruth leaves Naomi to glean, finds herself welcomed and abundantly provided for in Boaz's field, and then returns to tell Naomi all about this gracious provision.

**Reflection and Discussion**

Read Ruth 2 slowly and carefully. Then consider and write your reflections on the following questions, which move through the chapter section by section. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 479–481, or visit [www.esvbible.org](http://www.esvbible.org).)

**1. Setting Up Boaz and Ruth (2:1–7)**

Consider the ways in which the narrator introduces us to Boaz in the first four verses. Why this order of information, and what things can we discern about this man?

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Jewish law made provision for the poor, sojourners, widows, and orphans to gather (“glean”) grain that was standing in corners or borders of fields or that was dropped by reapers as they cut and tied the grain in sheaves (Lev. 19:9–10; 23:22; Deut. 24:19). Ruth qualifies for these gleanings in more than one category! As we watch her in verses 1–7, what things does the narrator want us to observe or discern about this young woman?

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**2. The Meeting of Boaz and Ruth (2:8–16)**

What details of Boaz’s abundant kindness to Ruth do you notice in Ruth 2:8–9, 14–16? What details do you enjoy, as they help you picture the scene?

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Verses 10–13 give us the heart of this meeting, in the characters’ words. First, what do Ruth’s words show about her heart, in verse 10 and verse 13?

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Boaz’s words in verses 11–12 capture the essence of this conversation and of this chapter. As Boaz blesses Ruth with his words, he builds up to the most important thing she has done. How does that phrase about God’s “wings” explain everything Ruth has done? (Note the following verses about God’s wings: Ex. 19:4; Ps. 36:7; 57:1.)

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Boaz prays that God will “repay” Ruth with a “full reward,” as she has come to take refuge under *his* wings (Ruth 2:12). Comment on just how that reward is given to Ruth in this chapter.

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### 3. Processing the Meeting of Boaz and Ruth (2:17–23)

Naomi forms this chapter’s bookends, as Ruth leaves her and then returns to her, carrying about an ephah of barley (over 5 gallons, or 24 liters), along with the leftovers from lunch (vv. 14, 18)! It’s a rich and overflowing scene—first with the food and grain, and finally with the amazing news of the source of all this abundance. There is some debate about whose “kindness” (*hesed*) Naomi refers to, in the first statement of verse 20. It certainly could refer to Boaz, but

### WEEK 3: A MEETING IN THE BARLEY FIELD

how might it perhaps most fittingly refer to the Lord? And how does this statement represent a reversal of perspective for Naomi, especially in contrast with certain statements in chapter 1?

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Next, in verse 20, Naomi informs Ruth that Boaz is one of her family’s “redeemers,” sometimes called “kinsman-redeemers.” Jewish law made provision for a near kinsman to redeem (buy back) land sold by a poverty-stricken relative, and even to redeem the relatives themselves who were sometimes sold into slavery if they had no way to pay their debts. The purpose was to keep the family and the God-given inheritance together (Lev. 25:25–55). At this point in the narrative, the fact that Boaz is a potential redeemer leads to no immediate conclusions. We know nothing so far of Elimelech’s land and what has happened to it. And yet, these women have found Boaz, who has shown kindness. Why does the narrator probably hope we’ll think back to the wording of Ruth 2:3?

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The Lord’s kindness never fails. Naomi thought it had. What various factors contributed to her opening her eyes? What can we learn from this, both as we need to see clearly and as we help others see clearly the kind providence of God always at work?

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Ruth chapter 3 does not happen the next day! How do the final three verses of chapter 2 make an important transition in the story?

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Read through the following three sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to consider the *Personal Implications* these sections may have for you.

### Gospel Glimpses

**REDEMPTION.** The redemption which now begins to wind as a strong thread through the rest of the narrative is a concrete historical practice—a legal provision that protected the lives and inheritances of many needy people in Israel. What a mercy that God should have established a way for the poor among his people to be rescued. This story’s theme of redemption is a concrete one, but in Scripture’s larger context we cannot help but follow this thread toward Jesus our Redeemer. The spiritually charged meaning of redemption grows in the book of Ruth, especially as we watch the narrative point toward the line of David and as we think wonderingly of the Son of David who accomplished for us “redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses” (Eph. 1:7).

**FAVOR TOWARD THE WEAK.** The Bible is full of needy people who receive favor from those who have power to help them. Every such story echoes the big story of needy human beings who receive unmerited favor from God through his Son. Ruth 2 highlights the word *favor* (vv. 2, 10, 13), as this poor foreigner humbly acknowledges her need and her wonder at that need being met with such favor—or such *grace*, as the Hebrew *hesed* can also be translated. This word often appears in conjunction with God’s *hesed*, his kindness or steadfast love: indeed, Ruth’s finding such favor leads Naomi to see that God’s “kindness” (*hesed*) “has not forsaken the living or the dead” (2:20).

## Whole-Bible Connections

**THE MOSAIC LAW.** The book of Ruth is rich with reference to laws God established to nurture and protect the poor and needy among his people. Both the laws concerning gleaning in the fields and those concerning redemption of land evidence the Lord's compassion for the needy and his call for his people to extend that same compassion. This story's gospel ramifications help us hold together a concern for both physical human need and the ultimately important spiritual need of every human being for a refuge in the Lord God.

**GOD'S WINGS.** Not only in the Old Testament do we find pictures of God's wings as our refuge. Jesus looked over Jerusalem and his own people who rejected him, saying, "How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" (Matt. 23:37). Back in the time of the judges, Ruth points us to the fullness of God's love that, finally rejected by his own people, reaches out to create a people from all the nations of the world.

## Theological Soundings

**PROVIDENCE.** Yes, providence again . . . overflowing! God's providence infuses this story from beginning to end, but in this chapter the pictures of it are especially rich, particularly in relation to harvest plenty. By the time Ruth leaves the field of Boaz which she "happens" upon, she has received more help than the law required (plenteous bread and water and wine, extra grain pulled out and left for her), more lunch than she can eat, and perhaps almost more barley than she can carry home! God's provision is pictured in Scripture not as measured out to be just enough, but rather as overflowing, poured down from the windows of heaven (Mal. 3:10), "good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over" (Luke 6:38), not just life but "abundant" life (John 10:10). The harvest that God ultimately promises is abundant and eternal (Ps. 126:6; John 4:31–38).

**GRACE AND GOOD WORKS.** Boaz prays that God will "repay" and "reward" Ruth for her selfless care of her mother-in-law (2:12). A quick reading might lead to the conclusion that Ruth's good works deserve God's good reward—that we somehow earn his favor. The climactic point of verse 12, however, is that what Ruth has done is to take refuge under the wings of the God of Israel. From that place of faith her good deeds have overflowed. Boaz prays she will be blessed not because she has earned any favor but because she has by grace found the place of blessing, in following the true God. Ruth's response of humble servanthood confirms this understanding of her as one who is responding to the grace and favor she receives.

## Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of Ruth 2 for your own life today. Make notes below on the personal implications for your walk with the Lord that you find in the (1) *Gospel Glimpses*, (2) *Whole-Bible Connections*, (3) *Theological Soundings*, and (4) this passage as a whole.

### 1. Gospel Glimpses

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### 2. Whole-Bible Connections

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### 3. Theological Soundings

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### 4. Ruth 2

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**As You Finish This Unit . . .**

**Take a moment now to ask for the Lord's blessing and help as you continue in this study of Ruth. Take a moment also to look back through this unit of study, to reflect on a few key things that the Lord may be teaching you—and perhaps to highlight and underline these things to review again in the future.**